PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.
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NEWSLETTER: June 2025

Long Forest Flora & Fauna Reserve
22 March 2025

This was our second visit to this reserve, having previously visited in 2017. The chief interest is that this reserve is home to a disjunct mallee community of the Bull Mallee *Eucalyptus behriana*—the only true mallee community known to occur east of the Dividing Range, some 180 km from the next nearest such community to the north-west. This is an environment quite distinct from the heathlands and woodlands of the Peninsula; described as Rocky Chenopod Scrub, it is an open woodland with sparse ground cover, very dry at the time of this visit. Besides the Bull Mallee, other eucalypts include Red Box, Grey Box and Yellow Gum. A more familiar tree is Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*). Eleven species of Acacia are found, including Golden Wattle *A. pycnantha* and the Gold-dust Wattle *A acinacea*. The mistletoe found here is the Box Mistletoe *Amyema miquellii*—some trees bearing heavy loads of this species. Numerous Jezebel butterflies were seen in the vicinity.

Eucalyptus behriana

Birds were scarce, but a couple not found on the Peninsula were White-winged Chough and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater; most were more familiar: Grey Fantails, White-eared, White-naped and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebill, Spotted Pardalote, Superb Fairy-wren, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Currawong, Crimson Rosella, and Grey Shrike-thrush. A Wedge-tailed Eagle soared majestically overhead. Tiny Thornbills high in the canopy caused much discussion, some observers opting for Yellow and some for Striated.

Ants, on the other hand, were extremely abundant, with most of the tracks (and the picnic area) seeming to be covered by their nests.

View across Pyrites Creek valley

The geology is quite interesting*. The Reserve occupies (mostly) the western side of a ridge formed between the Djerriwarrh Creek to the east and Pyrites Creek to the west. The ridge is underlain by Ordovician sandstone and mudstone laid down about 460 million years ago (mya) and capped by much more recent Pliocene (approx 4-5 mya) near-coastal deposits, called Sandringham Sandstone—formerly known as Red Bluff Sandstone and, on the Mornington Peninsula, Baxter Sandstone. In between there were deposits of glacial sediments in the Permian (about 300 mya), almost all of which have been eroded away. The creeks on each side have been deeply incised into the underlying Ordovician marine sandstone and mudstone, which has been folded and uplifted; the depth of the valleys is a consequence of the uplift. Outcrops of the sandstone can be seen on the side of the valley overlooking Pyrites Creek. The crest of the ridge to the west of Pyrites Creek is capped by newer volcanics basaltic lava flow one to four million years old.

Eremophila glabra "Murchison River"

On the way home we stopped for a brief visit at the Melton Botanic Gardens. We only had time to see the northern end, the most notable sight being the Eremophilas in flower.

*Information on the geology taken from *Stories Beneath Out Feet* by Leon Costermans and Fons VandenBerg, Costermans Publishing 2022, and Leon Costermans pers com.

Text and photos: Lee Denis

An Introduction to Australia's Birds and Their Habitats Tania Ireton, Bayside Birders, 12th March

Tania started with the origin of Australia during the split of Gondwana and the subsequent split from Asia from where Alfred Wallace created his theory of a line separating Asian fauna from ours due to the deep-water trough that didn't allow traffic even when water levels receded. This left woodpeckers, bulbuls and pheasants to the west, and honeyeaters, cockatoos and birds-of-paradise to the east. This is also why Australia and New Guinea share many bird species.

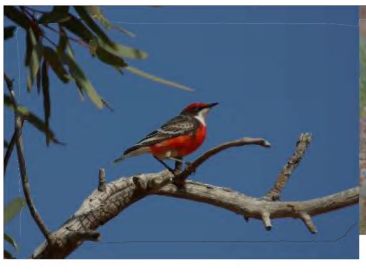
Early ornithologists confused us by their naming of many species based on 'old world' birds as their belief was that the birds originated in Europe, but recent findings show that songbirds originated in Australia. Consequently, wrens, babblers, chats, magpies, cuckoo-shrike, quail-thrush etc in Australia were different to their northern hemisphere namesakes.

Tania then explained how based on vegetation and phytogeographic regions nine endemic bird areas could be ascribed: North Western Australia; Cape York; Queensland Wet Tropics; Central Channel Country; Eastern Seaboard, South Eastern Australia, Tasmania, Southern and Central Deserts and South Western Australia. Tania gave numerous examples of birds from some of these regions. Examples were all she could give as there are now over 900 species recorded for Australia and its territories.

Cape York was shown to support classics like Eclectus Parrots, Magnificent Riflebirds and Palm Cockatoos, plus White-faced Robins, Varied Trillers, the many monarchs, Papuan Frogmouth and Southern Cassowary among many others.These were contrasted with birds from the Central Channel Country and parts of the Central Deserts that included species like Grey-fronted Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin, Splendid Fairy-wren, Grey Falcon, Gibberbird, Bourke's Parrot, Budgerigar, Flock Bronzewing, chats, grasswrens, whitefaces and many more.

Tania finished with South Western Australia a particular hotspot, where some more cracking birds were illustrated. These included the Red-capped Parrot, Red-eared Firetail, Blue-breasted Fairy-wren, Western Spinebill and White-breasted Robin.

When tired of seeing these birds from the mainland, Tania pointed out that there are many more to find on the external territories. As usual, Tania's presentation was very well illustrated with her own photos, supplemented by some from the Birdlife photographers' group and other individuals. **Text: Rog Standen. Photos: Tania Ireton**—Crimson Chat, Flock Bronzewing, Magnificent Riflebird, Red-capped Parrot.



Lesser Mealworm

Stories behind the observations.

This innocuous looking small black beetle has an interesting backstory. Only recently identified for me on iNaturalist, it is a Lesser Mealworm (*Alphitobius diaperinus*) that turned up at my February survey at Woods Reserve.

A new species for the reserve, a quick check of iNat showed it is the first record for Victoria, and fourth in Australia (one in each of Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth) making for the question of "why is this so widespread but poorly reported?"

It turns out there is one record on BOLD (suburban Townsville) but 525 on the Atlas of Living Australia (I think all museum records).

So, what is going on? It turns out this beetle is a worldwide pest of poultry sheds and certain grain storages among other things. It also turns out that it originated in tropical Africa which would explain why it doesn't get reported in temperate climates in the bush

and especially not in cooler Victoria. The identifier, a prolific beetle ID specialist, informed me in response to my question that there are no records in Europe outside poultry and other animal sheds either.

This is another example of how it is only finding out what something is (i.e. identification) enables us to understand what its role in life is.

PS It is not to be confused with the mealworms commonly sold as pet food. These are another darkling beetle (*Tenebrio molitor*).
Text & photo by Rog Standen

Boggy Creek
12th April

For a small reserve Little Boggy Creek Reserve packs a punch. Frankston City Council manages 3.7ha of the reserve, whist the other 6.7ha is managed by Melbourne Water. Little Boggy Creek is a tributary of Boggy Creek, an important natural corridor linking habitats and flowing into nearby environmentally sensitive waterways and wetlands. Originating in Langwarrin, Little Boggy Creek, then Boggy Creek, run through the Langwarrin quarry, the Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve, through Skye, Carrum Downs and Seaford, where Boggy Creek joins Eel Race Creek (Drain) before flowing into Kananook Creek and ending its journey in Port Phillip Bay at Frankston.

According to the Melbourne Water information sign spotted at the end of our walk, what Melbourne Water call the 'Little Boggy Creek Retarding Basin' contains the vegetation communities of swamp scrub, damp heathy woodland, heathy woodland and riparian scrub, all threatened, except for healthy woodland. It also contains the locally threatened sword-grass brown butterfly and scrambling coral-fern, as well as the dwarf Galaxis fish and wax-lip orchid.

Nine members attended, meeting at 10am at Langwarrin Plaza on Cranbourne Road on a warm day of 28 degrees. Our excursion involved walking a 1.6km circuit of unpaved but good walking tracks on either side of the creek between Granite and Lexton Drives. Rear fences of housing bounded one side of the track for most of the walk. We began by walking a short distance across Granite Drive to the Little Boggy Creek Reserve. The largest body of water was visible at the Granite Drive bridge (behind Woolworths), where several Dusky Moorhens and Pacific Black Ducks were spotted in the water and resting on a sand bar.

Boggy Ck near Granite Drive

Our next two viewpoints of the creek were only found by exploring short, narrow bush tracks. At these points the creek was nearly dry, a big contrast to the view from Granite Drive. More satisfying was the view of the creek in the reserve between Lexton Drive and Quarry Road, where we saw the sandy banks approximately 1 metre high with the creek branching off into 2 tributaries, however the water level was again very low. By this point Little Boggy Creek has become Boggy Creek. Our final glimpse of the Creek was a trickle in a drainage outlet near Lexton Drive, where the creek emerged from under Quarry Road. From there it flows onwards through the Langwarrin quarry, which extracts the area's abundant sand. On this point, a Melbourne Water worker mentioned that they frequently need to dredge the creek to prevent it from becoming blocked with sand.

Boggy Ck near Lexton Drive

We observed several large tree ferns, some healthier looking than others, as well as large swathes of scrambling coral-fern, great habitat for small birds. Other plants spotted included knotweed, blackwood, narrow-leaf peppermint, wedding bush and Cassytha (Dodder Laurel), which I had never seen and found quite fascinating.

I was excited to see my first occupied tree hollow which Sue spotted for us. The brush tail possum must have heard our chatter as it poked its head out to see what was happening, giving us all a thrill. The occupant of a second tree hollow was unidentifiable with only some greyish fur showing.

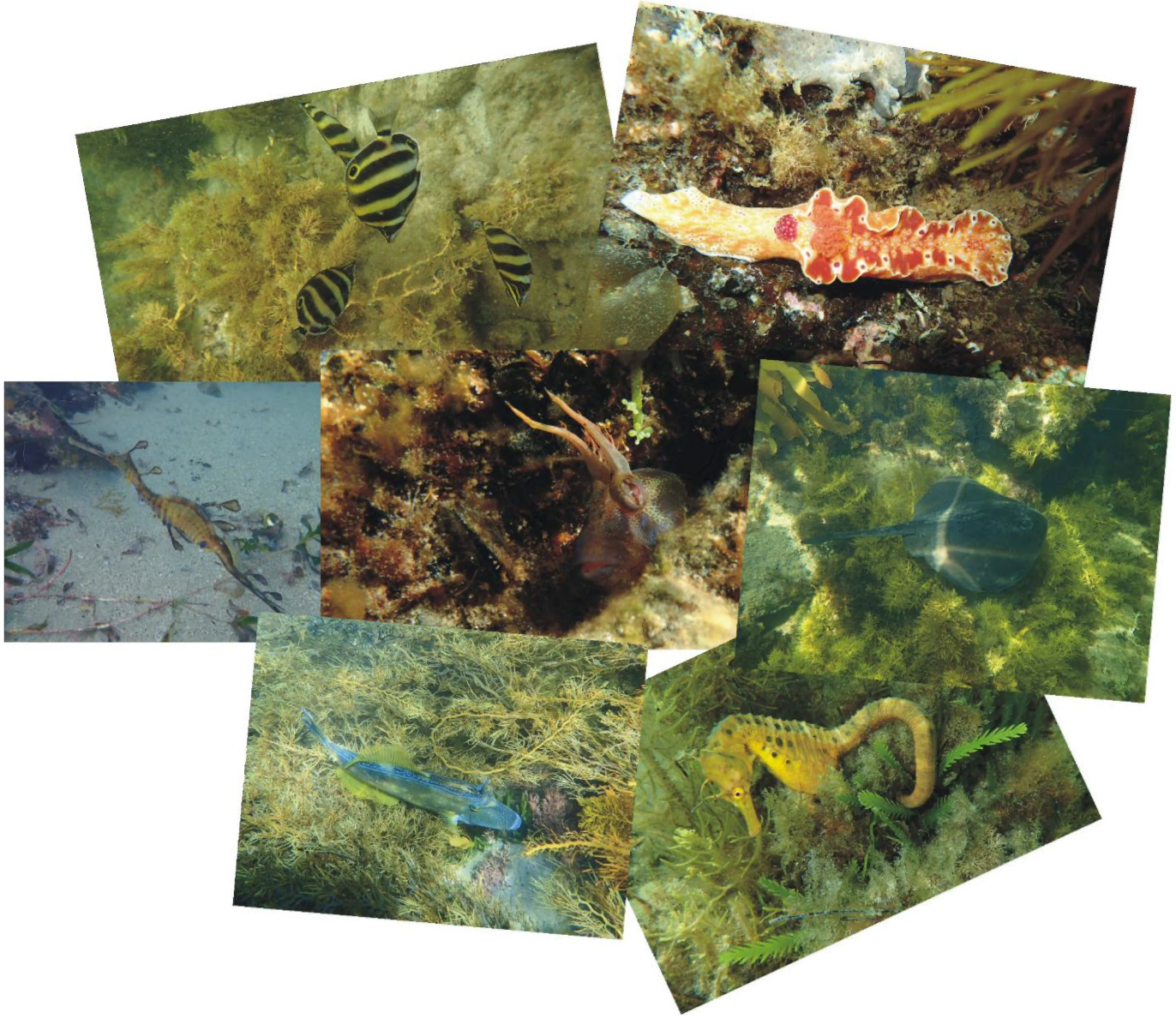
Brushtail Possum

We heard several frog calls including the Eastern smooth froglet and the Eastern Banjo frog ('Pobblebonk'). Birds observed included butcher bird, spotted pardalote (heard), yellow faced honeyeater, rainbow lorikeet, dusky moor hen, pacific black duck, noisy miner, little and red wattle birds, spotted dove, brown thornbill, magpie, magpie lark, swallow, fairy wren and kookaburra. Several unidentified butterflies were also spotted (perhaps one was a sword-grass brown butterfly!).

Given the rising heat, we finished up around 1pm after a very interesting and rewarding morning. —**Text and photos: Sharon Clifford except Brushtail photo: Sue Brabender**

Snorkeling on the Peninsula
Sue Brabender 14th May

Sue is a long-time snorkelling enthusiast and shared with us photos and videos from some of her favourite sites off the Peninsula, both on the Port Phillip and the Western Port sides. She prefers to dive without a wetsuit, so it is largely a summer activity—when water temperature falls below 18°C snorkelling season is over! She snorkels off the beach, often under piers, in water between two and four metres. Once in less than a metre of water at Rye Pier, she encountered two pairs of legs, a man and his son wondering what she was looking at so close to the beach, it was a seahorse. In slightly deeper water feral spearfishers can be a problem —safety first dictates that a quick retreat is the best option.



Centre: Tasmanian Blenny; clockwise from top right: Nudibranch - Shorttailed cerastoma; Stingaree species; Potbelly Seahorse; Sixspine Leatherjacket; Weedy Seadragon; Moonlighters

There is a difference in the seabed sediments between Port Phillip and Western Port: the sand tends to be coarser on the Port Phillip side, which means much better visibility, while the more silty bottom on the Western Port side often means that the sighting range is quite close.

Port Phillip sites featured included Blairgowrie and Rye Piers, and off the beach at a couple of favourite sites in Mt Martha and Mornington. The main Western Port site was the Flinders pier and occasionally Mushroom Reef.

Sue took us through scenes including different schools of fish; colourful nudibranchs and sea-squirts; squid and cuttlefish; seahorses, weedy sea dragons and pipefish; encrusting coraline algae and sponges; corals, sea anemones and sea stars. A video showed the sandy seabed suddenly come to life as a huge ray emerged and swam off. An amazing diversity of life proving that you don't have to go to the Great Barrier Reef to be entranced by the underwater world, nor do you need scuba gear.

Our near coastal waters are not without issues: introduced sea stars are creating problems, as are native sea urchins, which have built up to plague numbers due to removal of natural predators and increased nutrient run-off, and are having a severe impact on kelp and other plants creating urchin barrens.

Sue is a hot gospeller for the delights of snorkelling. Did she make any converts? Next snorkelling season will tell!

Text: Lee Denis. Photos: Sue Brabender

Ada Tree
17th May

Four members set off for Powelltown despite the unpromising weather and were rewarded with a delightful day. Fine drizzle soon gave way to a misty day as we decided to travel on to the Ada Tree. After turning off the Powelltown-Noojee road we were treated to the sight of one Superb Lyrebird after another scooting across the road or along the verge. Both males and females were out and about; by the time it occcurred to us to start couning we were behind the game but we thought there were at least 10 over the duration of the trip. A wrong turn took us out of our way but past a mixed flock of King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas, with Galahs and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos on the paddocks—not a great bird-watching day in terms of numbers, but definitely so in terms of species.

Arriving at our destination we were inclined to put our field naturalist instincts on hold and enjoy the environment as tourists (only partially successful). We agreed that these were the best weather conditions for appreciating this environment. The overcast sky and misty air—not raining, not dripping off the trees, just moisture in the air—showed off to its best advantage the mix of towering Mountain Ash and Myrtle Beech, cloaked with moss and epiphytic ferns, with an understory of Soft Tree-ferns and other lower-growing ferns like False Bracken, Bat's-wing Fern, and Water-ferns. Reminiscent of southern Tasmania and the west coast of New Zealand's South Island—just wouldn't be the same in bright sunshine. The ground covered with various species of moss, notably a patch of Dawsonia looking rather un-mosslike, more like a forest of miniature pine trees; fungi including pink coral fungi.

The return leg of the circuit follows a vehicle access track higher up, which allows wheelchair access to the boardwalk leading to the Ada Tree. Here the vegetation is less damp, dominated by Mountain Ash; the tree ferns are fewer and mostly Rough Tree-fern, and the understory includes acacias, Stinkwood (*Zieria arborescens*—very unfortunate common name) which was in flower, Mountain Correa (just past flowering), Mountain Groundsel in flower, and Purple Apple-berry (with purple fruits).

Dawsonia superba var. pulchra

The Ada Tree itself is suitably impressive, with considerable effort on boardwalks and signage; there were other tourists making the short walk from the car park. When a couple of leeches made their presence felt we considered that we had completed the full experience.

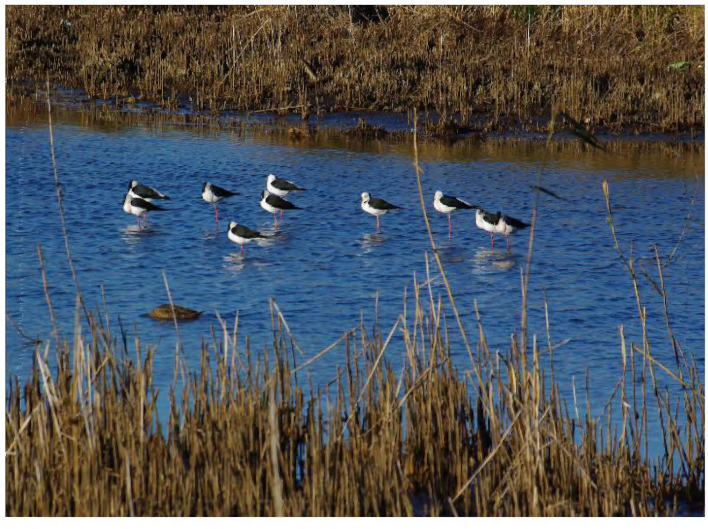
Text and photos: Lee Denis

Birding Reports

Seaford Wetlands April 7th

For a number of years our annual visit to the swamp has been in May but this year we copped a cool drizzly day with a stiff cold south-west wind, unusual for our generally mild autumn.

Seven club members, including Craig, walked the 8km. loop; he had not been here before and was surprised by the size of the area. Bird numbers were down a bit on previous years and it was interesting for what we didn't see - no Flame Robins, no Red-browed Finches, no Kestrel, no Black-shouldered Kite. We did have good views of an Australasian Grebe, Black-fronted Dotterel and Black-winged Stilts on the central lagoon. I'm hoping it's the warm autumn weather that has kept the Flame Robins in the high country and they'll arrive soon at their winter residence. I'll keep watching and hoping; their arrival in April - May is the highlight of my year. The total for the day was 31 species. **Text and Photo by Heather Ducat**



Banyan Wetlands May 5th

Brown Falcon

Our recent visits to this venue have been fraught with difficulty. Last year our visit in September coincided with gale-force winds which made birdwatching on the wetland almost impossible. This year we found that the wetland was completely dry, so not a bird on it. As they did last year, the Flame Robins came to the rescue—more this year than last, as usual many more females than males spotted. At least 5 males, maybe 15 to 20 females. It is noteworthy that cattle are still run in these paddocks. Keeping company with the robins were Superb Fairy-wrens, Willie Wagtails and Goldfinches. The usual Magpies, Magpie-larks and Little Ravens were in evidence, with Silvereyes in the boxthorn.

The other notable sightings were raptors: Australian Kestrel, Brown Falcon, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Black-shouldered Kite. The afore-mentioned cattle were accompanied by a dozen or so Cattle Egrets. Our total bird count came to 21. We added a few more at Patterson River, only the usual suspects:Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants, Chestnut Teal, Pelican etc.
Text and photo: Lee Denis

Tiny wasp parasitises psylloids

A short visit to the Mornington railway line recently turned up a surprise. Leaves on a young eucalypt showed up a distinctive pattern of damage and when I checked it out on the reverse side there was evidence of psylloids feeding on each of the damaged areas when sucking the phloem from the leaves.

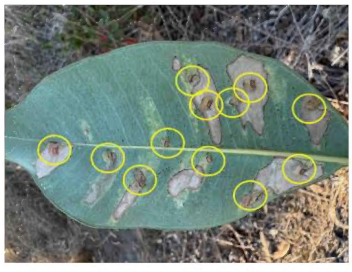
The evidence was the lerps that are shaped like seashells. Lerps are the protective cover that immature psylloids make with excess carbohydrate they need to consume to get enough micronutrients from the plant sap.

When I looked under the lerps, most were empty (adults had emerged and gone) but some had tiny black pupal cases under them. I was intrigued by what they might become so took a couple home to watch.

What has emerged so far is a wasp that has the most amazing antennae I've seen on a wasp. Many beetles and moths have great antennae, but I've not seen anything like it on a wasp. This wasp is tiny (<3mm long) and I think it is a Chalcidoid wasp in the Tetracnemoidea genus, but I may be proved wrong in this.

The psylloids are in the *Cardiaspina* genus and the black bodies are what remain of the parasitised psyllid nymphs. What you can see is the exoskeleton of the psyllids, in which the parasitoid wasp larva developed. It is enthralling what happens in this micro world around us. - **Text and photos: Rog Standen**

Upper leaf surface showing damage.



Underside of leaf showing at least one lerp on each damaged area

Tiny parasitoid wasp with feathery antennae

Shell-like lerps with 'mummified' psylloid exoskeletons

Contact Us

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc
CAV: A0010510T
Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip on the following Satur-day. Visitors always welcome.
We also go birding on the first Monday of the month. Further information and current Program of Activities can be found at our website:
www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

We are also on Face book: **Peninsula Field Nats**

Email: penfieldnats@gmail.com

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